

Frontier Forts in the South Branch Valley*

By Charles Morrison

DURING THE decade following the defeat of General Braddock's army, in 1755, a number of 'forts' appeared along the South Branch. By way of explanation it might be well to think of the frontier forts in terms of three general classifications: strategic forts, colonial forts, and settler's forts. The colonial forts were built primarily for the defense of the frontier: the settler's forts were little more than places of refuge for the inhabitants nearby in case of an Indian attack. All of the forts along the South Branch would fall into these two classifications; some of the settler's forts were probably built before 1755. These and the nearby strategic fort at Wills Creek (Cumberland) were part of a line of forts which extended from the Iroquois country in northern New York southwestward to the Cherokee lands along the Tennessee River.

The strategic forts were built as a means of asserting British control over the territory east of the Appalachian mountain range. They were also intended to provide advanced positions from which to check French claims to the territory west of the mountains when that need might arise.

In the course of time the French did extend a line of forts from their base in Canada up the St. Lawrence River and then, by way of the Great Lakes, to the upper tributaries of the Mississippi, particularly the Allegheny and Ohio rivers. The high-water mark of this military movement was the establishment of Fort DuQuesne at the forks of the Ohio, now Pittsburgh. This was the objective which General Braddock sought to take in 1755; his plan was to roll back the French line towards the St. Lawrence River and Canada.

The two lines of forts, in addition to delineating the claims of two European powers, marked, in a general way, the boundary between two rival Indian confederacies—the Algonquins and the Iroquois. In the earliest days of colonial history the eastern edge of the Iroquois corridor, or salient, was probably along the line of the Blue Ridge. It is also likely that the western edge of this same corridor generally followed the summit of the Appalachians. Beyond, other Algonquin tribes held sway.

By the time the British and French were moving towards the

* Adapted from *Wagonroads* by the same author.

Ohio, the eastern Algonquins had been evicted from their tribal lands along the Atlantic coast. Those that survived found sanctuary with others of their confederacy across the Ohio River. In displacing the eastern Algonquins the colonies had been aided by the Iroquois League. The Iroquois were perhaps the most politically advanced of all the North American Indians, and although they proclaimed a philosophy of peace, this did not apply to their hereditary foes, the Algonquins. Through their confederacy, the Five-Nations (later the Six-Nations), the Iroquois leaders concluded a succession of treaties with the colonial governments of England whereby the frontier of white settlement was moved from the Blue Ridge, eventually to the Ohio River.

The Algonquin tribes, of course, were never a party to these arrangements. Pushed into the Ohio Valley by force and by treaties they had not signed, they naturally accepted, perhaps as the lesser of two evils, the intrusion of the French as they moved towards the Mississippi. Thus, the same facts of geography which had emerged as a political boundary between Indian nations had now been joined by the rival political ambitions of two European nations.

No attempt will be made to list the French fortifications which marked their line of advance from the St. Lawrence. The major British forts around the Atlantic colonies were Fort Edward and Fort William Henry guarding the entrance to the upper Hudson River Valley, the Oswego forts and Fort Bull between Lake Ontario and the Mohawk River, Fort Ligonier and Fort Bedford in Pennsylvania, and Fort Cumberland in Maryland. To the south, Fort Loudoun was built along the Tennessee River, Forts Prince George and Augusta, along the Savannah River, and two near the mouth of the Altamaha River in territory claimed by the Spanish government of Florida.

Within this long, narrow perimeter the thirteen Atlantic colonies developed the spirit which led the way to the dominance of North America by the English speaking people. But it was not easy; and, as one of the outcomes, Britain lost her middle Atlantic colonies and the French lost their seemingly secure hold on Canada.

The British forts along the Atlantic perimeter guarded strategic routes through and across the Appalachian mountain barrier. The northern and southern ends of the salient rested in the nominally friendly territory of the Iroquois tribes—the Six-Nations in New York, and Catawba and Cherokee to the south—but the western line of forts faced a no man's land which reached to the waters of the Ohio River.

There were several facets to the ensuing conflict. In one sense it was an extension of the larger conflict between France and England, which was essentially European in scope and nature. The battlefield in America was far-distant from both countries, and until larger issues were decided the colonial authorities would have to fend for themselves with little help from the homeland.

This became another aspect of the struggle. The French colonials may have been of one mind but the English were not. Each English colony had its own background and interests. Of the three that might have felt some concern about the French intrusion into the Ohio Valley only one, Virginia, made any real attempt to expel them. Although Maryland's western boundary had not been determined, it could not, by any stretch of the imagination, reach to the Ohio River. Nor were the Pennsylvanians certain that their charter provision of 5 degrees of longitude west of the Delaware River would encompass the forks of the Ohio. But the proprietors and governors of all three colonies were bound to the British crown, and the promise of help could not be denied the Virginians. Too often, however, no real help was forthcoming.

Initial efforts to dislodge the French were futile. In the first, Lieutenant Colonel George Washington was defeated at Fort Necessity, a hastily built defensive position about 48 miles west of Fort Cumberland. The second attempt, this time with help from England, was even more disastrous. It was led by Major General Edward Braddock. His force consisted of about 1400 British regulars and 700 colonial troops. Washington, then without a commission, was a member of his staff.

As a fighting force, Braddock's well organized columns were destroyed when they were about eight miles from their goal. As a result of a wound received during the engagement, General Braddock died on the road back to Fort Cumberland. He was buried not far from Fort Necessity. Virginia's efforts to dislodge the French had failed.

Along the Allegheny frontier the war took on a new and more cruel aspect. Indian war parties appeared on the east side of the mountains. British-Indian alliances were never too stable, and although the Iroquois tribes were not actively hostile they were dismayed at Braddock's defeat. It was Braddock who had haughtily disdained the aid of some friendly Delawares sent to him by the Six Nations. Some of the Delawares went over to the French, and later their masters, the Senecas, were also won to France.

It was the Delawares who raided peaceful Pennsylvania. They were led by Shingass, whose mother, Queen Aliquippa, had befriended Washington on one of his early missions to negotiate with the French. Such was the nature of the Indian alliance. To counter such depredations, the colony of Pennsylvania built its own line of forts along the base of the curving line of mountains to the west of the Cumberland Valley.

It was the supposedly neutral Shawnees who returned to the valleys of Virginia they once had roamed in search of game. Now they were in search of booty, scalps, and captives. Washington, his commission restored, was given command of Virginia's western defenses. But in the meantime, the inhabitants of the valleys, despairing of help from either the British or colonial governments had built their own frontier forts. These were mostly places of refuge where the settlers and their families could find safety in times of peril. They were not formidable from a military point of view, not even defensively, but they were seldom attacked. The families belonging to these forts usually lived in their own cabins. When compelled by some alarm they would move into the fort. During the day the men might even venture forth under arms to work their farms, leaving the women and children to the protection of the fort. This was called 'forting'.

There was no plan to the location of these settlement forts, and Washington found many of them unsuitable for any general or concerted defense of the frontier. Accordingly, he submitted a plan for a chain of colonial forts which would reach from the Potomac River to the North Carolina border. These he would garrison with troops from the re-organized Virginia Regiment, which had been placed under his command. The northern part of the line commenced along Patterson Creek, and then followed the South Branch to its headwaters. From there it continued along the corresponding tributary of the James, reaching the Carolina border by way of the Roanoke River and its tributaries.

Washington did not include Fort Cumberland in his plan. That was in Maryland anyway. But he well knew that it would be important in attaining the ultimate objective—that of driving the French back into Canada. However, that would not be achieved by Virginia alone; at the moment he was responsible only for the defense of the colony.

For that purpose, Washington contemplated a base at Winchester, with a fort strong enough and large enough to serve as a supply depot for the frontier forces and as a place of refuge for the inhabi-

tants of the lower valleys should that need arise. The fort, later named for Lord Loudoun, was authorized and built, partly by Washington's own efforts and possibly with some of his money.

A list of the forts in Washington's defense plan¹ follows.

WASHINGTON'S LIST OF FORTS

Name of Fort or Person Commanding	Stream or Location	Planned Garrison ¹	Distance Between Forces ²
Fort Loudoun	Winchester	100	
Fort Maidstone	Potomac at the mouth of Cacapon River	125	
*Enoch's Fort	Cacapon River	75	30 miles ³
Fort at Parker's	South Branch	30	15
Fort at Ashby's	Patterson Creek	60	10
Fort at Cocke's	Patterson Creek	500	12
Fort Pleasant	South Branch	60	20
Fort Defiance	South Branch	60	20
Upper Settlement	South Branch	60	20
*Trout Rock	South Branch	75	20
*	South Branch ⁴	50	15
Christy	Jackson River	40	18
Fort Dinwiddie	Jackson River	100	15
Brakenridge	Jackson River	40	14
Dickenson's	Jackson River	250	16
*	Craig's Creek	40	18
Fort William	Catawba Creek	75	15
*Bryant's	Roanoke River	50	18
Capt. Hog	Roanoke River	150	18
Capt. Terry	Black Water	20	26
Capt. Galloway	Smith's River	20	26
Capt. Harris	Mayo River	20	12

*Forts not built at the time of Washington's memorandum, March 1756. Superscripts refer to Author's comments which follow.

Author's Comments on the Location of the Forts

1. Total Planned Garrison: 2000.
2. The average distance between forts on the line as listed by Washington is 20 miles. There are some discrepancies, however. He did not have accurate maps, nor were the strategic distances between the forts necessarily the same as they would appear today. Based on present knowledge, the distances given ought to be reduced by an average of 10 percent.
3. If our knowledge of the location of Fort Maidstone and Enoch's Fort is correct, the distance between them should not be more than 20 miles.
4. Based on relative distances, the fort between Chirsty and Trout Rock must have been along a tributary of the South Branch, possibly Strait Creek. A likely site would have been at Forks of Water, where Strait Creek joins the South Branch. Actually, the fort may never have been built.

In The South Branch Valley

There were other forts, not in the plan, which are mentioned in some of Washington's letters and memoranda; still others are referred to in regional history books; and some have received only scant attention anywhere. Their size and character varied from in-

¹ Louis E. Knott, *The Virginia Frontier, 1734-1763*, (The John Hopkins Press, 1925.)

dividual dwellings fitted with gunports to stockades in which cabins were enclosed or formed one side thereof, the corners being built as bastions or blockhouses. The common essential to all of them was access to water.

At least 85 names of forts can be found in the sources referred to here. These include the colonial forts listed in Washington's memorandum of March, 1756, and the settler's forts which had been built or were built along Virginia's western frontier about that time. In some cases the same name seems to be applied to different forts, and in others a fort is referred to by more than one name.

There were at least 22 of the frontier forts in the valleys of the Potomac's South Branch. A few of them are remembered by highway signs which mark their general location, but other than that there is little by which the dread and tragedy of that fearful decade is recalled.² Apart from the intrusions of modern society, all is quiet and peaceful now; and nearby there is the stream on which the occupants of the fort depended.

As the tide of settlement moved westward the forts along the valleys fell into disuse. They were never important militarily, but they did reflect the character and determination of the frontiersmen who later left the valleys to serve in Washington's armies. They had served together before.

LIST OF FORTS IN SOUTH BRANCH VALLEY

Name of Fort	Location ¹	Description	References
Bingaman	N. Mill Creek, 6 mi. s. of Petersburg	Settler's residence	k
Buttermilk or Waggener's Upper Fort	S. Branch, 3 mi. s. of Moorefield	Stockade	k m v z
Defiance ²	S. Branch, nr. Petersburg	On Washington's list of forts	z
Furman	S. Branch, 1 mi. s. of Hanging Rocks, 3 mi. n. of Romney	Stockade	k m z
George	S. Branch, opp. Petersburg	Small stockade	k m z
Hinkle's	Germany Valley, Pendleton County	Private fort; monument at site	
Hopewell	S. Branch, exact location unknown; possibly along Seneca Creek, nr. Onego		m z
Mason's Mill ³	nr. Upper Tract		
McKenzie	S. Branch, exact location unknown		z m

¹The Tennessee Mountain Festival, held at Franklin in Pendleton County each September, is named for some legendary treasure which was supposedly buried on a mountain after the attack on Fort Defiance in 1756. In recent years the festival has commemorated the history of Fort Defiance and Upper Tract.

List of Forts In The South Branch Valley — (Continued)

Name of Fort	Location ¹	Description	References
Parker's	S. Branch, 10 mi. from Fort Ashby; probably about 2 mi. e. of Grace, Hampshire County	On Washington's list of forts	z
Patterson	S. Branch, exact location unknown		z
Pauls	At Big Spring, nr. Springfield, Hampshire County		z
Pearsall	S. Branch, nr. Mill Creek Gap, w. of Romney		c f v z
Peterson ²	S. Branch, 2 mi. above North Fork	Small stockade	c m v z
Pleasant, or Van Meter	Old Fields, Hardy County	On Washington's list of forts; a strong fort, incl. cabins palisades, and blockhouses	c k m v z
Seybert	South Fork, 12 mi. ne. of Franklin	A strong fort, incl. cabins, palisades, and blockhouses	a c k m v
Town	S. Branch, 1½ mi. n. of Moorefield		k
Trout Rock	S. Branch, 4 mi. s. of Franklin	On Washington's list of forts	v z
Unnamed	Between Christy and Trout Rock. See note under Washington's list of forts	On Washington's list of forts	z
Unnamed	S. Branch, 7 mi. s. of Romney (2 mi. n. of The Trough)		k
Unnamed (May have been Parker's)	S. Branch, 8 mi. below Romney (nr. the highway bridge 2 mi. s. of Springfield)		k
Upper	Upper Tract,	A stockade fort, on Washington's list	a c m v z
Settlement ³	Pendleton County		
Williams	S. Branch, 2 mi. n. of Hanging Rocks	A stockade fort	k m z

KEY TO REFERENCES

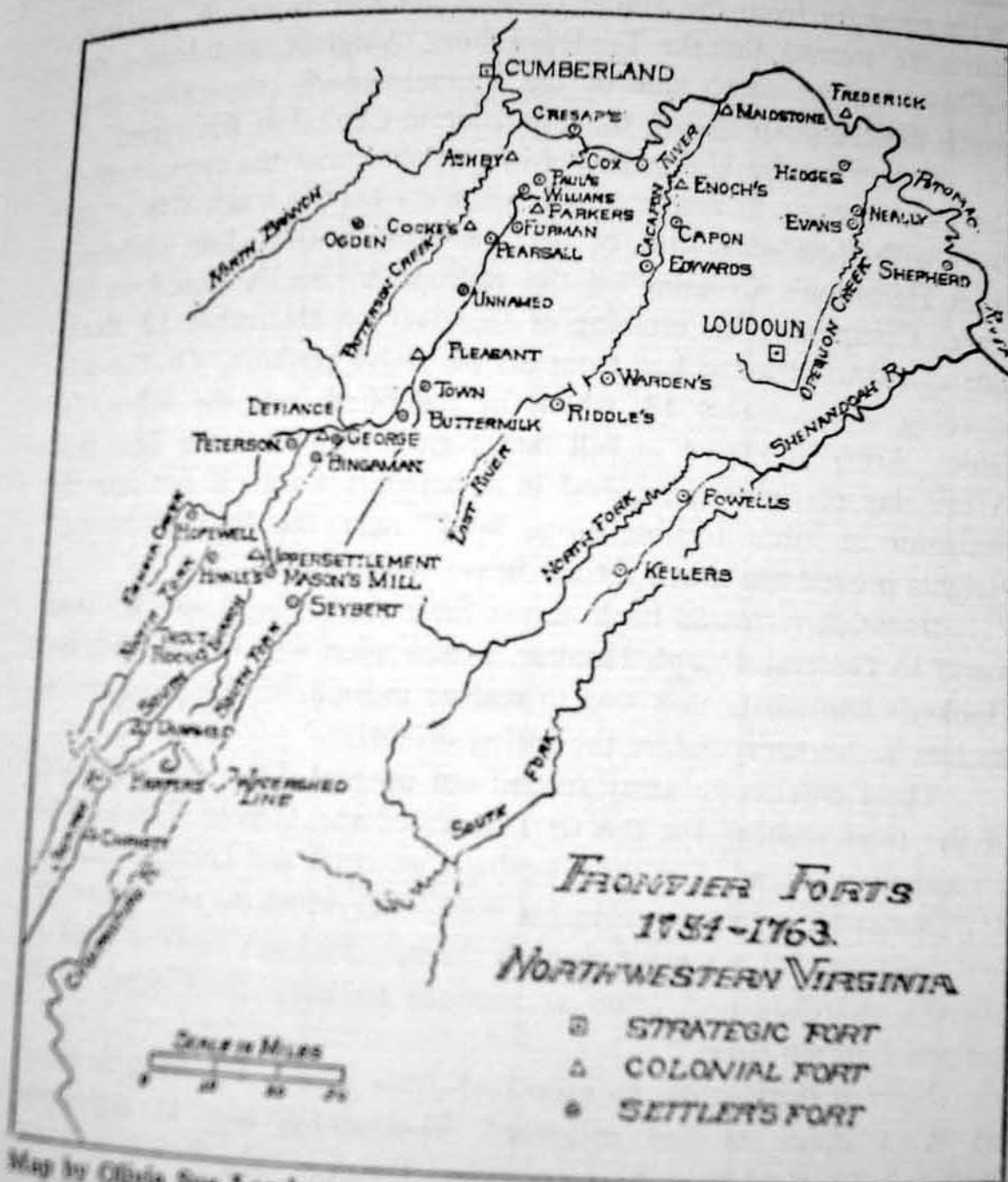
- ¹—Anshier and Summers, *West Virginia: The Mountain State*.
²—James M. Callahan, *Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia*.
³—Douglas S. Freeman, *George Washington, Vol. II*.
⁴—Kitchin, *A History of the Valley of Virginia*.
⁵—Myers, *History of West Virginia*.
⁶—F. G. Legley's map in *Virginia Frontier* as reproduced in *George Washington, Vol. II*.
⁷—Linn K. Kautz, *The Virginia Frontier*.
 Superscripts refer to Author's comments which follow.

**Author's Comments on the Forts
In the South Branch Valley**

1. For the relative location of the forts, see map, *Frontier Forts, 1754-1763*, Northwestern Virginia.
2. In addition to Washington's plan of *Frontier Forts*, there was another list for Augusta County, prepared by a Council of War in response to the Governor's order. The Council met at the Court House (now Staunton) and drew up a list, which included three forts along the upper South Branch in what was then Augusta County. In comparing this list with Washington's it seems likely that in two cases the same forts are referred to by different names. Fort Peterson and Fort Defiance may well have been the same fort. The Council listed it as Fort Peterson and placed it on the South Branch, two miles above the North Fork. Washington placed Fort Defiance on the South Branch, 20 miles from Fort Pleasant. By these measurements the two locations are reasonably coincident.
3. Washington's fort at the Upper Settlement may likewise have been the same fort as that at Hugh Mason's Mill. The Council listed a fort at Hugh Man's Mill, 18 miles above Fort Peterson and 17 miles from Trout Rock. This would place it at Upper Tract (Washington's Upper Settlement). The Council's distances were more realistic than Washington's.

Isolated references also refer to a fort at Upper Tract by the name of Hugh Mason's Mill and Hugh Mann's Mill. These names would appear to be variants of Hugh Man's Mill in the Council list, which may well have been the fort referred to by Washington as the fort at the Upper Settlement.

MAP OF FORTS ALONG THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER 1754-1763



Map by Orlia Sue Lambert

Forts not shown:
 Hume, Kaykendall's, Mendenhall, Paris's, and White's—location unknown.
 McKenna and Patterson—Along South Branch, exact location unknown.
 Selton—Along Patuxent Creek, exact location unknown.

The Other War in 1774: Dunmore's War

by Robert L. Kerby

NOT EVERY prospective American revolutionary spent the years from 1763 to 1775 waiting expectantly for the Revolution to happen. In the autumn of 1774, almost a year after Boston celebrated its Tea Party and more than a month after the First Continental Congress convened, over two thousand Virginia and Pennsylvania militiamen marched under the command of Virginia's last royal governor, John Murray, the fourth Earl of Dunmore, to wage a brief but decisive Indian war on the edge of the Ohio country. Despite strained relations between Dunmore and Virginia's legislature, and despite the accumulation of disturbing news from New England, New York, and Philadelphia, neither Dunmore nor his army anticipated the dissolution of Virginia's ties to the British Empire. On the contrary, according to the words of a song recorded enroute by one of the campaign's participants, the "offspring of Britain" who followed Dunmore into Ohio aimed to "extend the Dominion of George our Great King," and they drank "Health to great Dunmore our general also, wishing he may conquer wherever he go."¹ Yet these troops were not Tories. Within months after their return from the Indian frontier many of them would become soldiers of the Revolution, and some would take part in the uprising which chased Dunmore from Virginia's soil. But in the fall of 1774 events had not yet forced these men to choose between America's liberties and loyalty to the Crown, and history had not yet forgotten that many American patriots became revolutionaries belatedly, with only the greatest reluctance.

Dunmore's War was the culmination of a long series of mutual grievances and outrages which, between the spring and fall of 1774, dovetailed to produce a clash of arms between the frontiersmen of western Virginia and the Shawnee and Mingo Indians living along the Scioto, Muskingum, and upper Ohio rivers. Since 1763, the British government had endeavored to restrain settlers from penetrating beyond the Alleghenies, but land companies, distinguished colonists, and footloose squatters looked with hungry eyes toward the fabled Kentucky country, and used every means at their disposal to press claims to western lands. Modifications of the original Proclamation

¹ "John Newall's Journal, Oct. 17, 1774," in Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg, eds., *Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774* (Madison, Wis.: 1903), 361.